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# International Journal of Men's Social and Community Health

## “LET’S DUCK OUT OF THE WIND”: OPERATIONALISING INTERSECTIONALITY TO UNDERSTAND THE CAREGIVING EXPERIENCES OF ELDERLY HUSBANDS

Lynne Kilvington-Dowd<sup>1,\*</sup>, Steve Robertson<sup>2,3,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Western Sydney University, Australia; <sup>2</sup>University of Sheffield, UK; <sup>3</sup>Leeds Beckett University, UK;

<sup>4</sup>Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland

**Author for Correspondence:** Lynne Kilvington-Dowd: [L.Dowd@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:L.Dowd@westernsydney.edu.au)

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to demonstrate how Bourdieu’s conceptual tools of habitus, capital and field can facilitate the operationalisation of intersectionality. Following an appreciation of the methodological issues arising from the practical application of intersectionality, we introduce data from an Australian study of husbands caring for wives with dementia. With care often being constructed as a feminine practice, men’s care-giving experiences are frequently said to be in tension with many hegemonic masculine practices. However, men are not homogenous, rather their experiences are shaped by intersections of gender, age, class and other identity-defining categories. To help explore some of these intersections, 16 interviews, six of which were enhanced by photo-elicitation methods, were undertaken with a purposive sample of retired husbands caring for a spouse with dementia. Thematic analysis was then employed. In this paper, we present data and themes relating to the husband’s experiences around independence and self-sufficiency and coping strategies and emotional autonomy. However, the main purpose of the paper is not to focus on these empirical findings per se. Rather, we draw on these data to illustrate how Bourdieu’s work was utilised to help address some of the concerns that have been encountered when applying intersectional theory to empirical research; that is to say, this is primarily a methodological paper. The empirical findings highlight the complex and class influenced ways that husband carers look to sustain independence and autonomy. They further illustrate how the cultural capital accrued through past experiences facilitates or restrains coping mechanisms and associated emotional autonomy during their caregiving journeys. Methodologically, we use these empirical data to demonstrate how Bourdieu’s notions of habitus, capital and field can overcome three specific criticisms when applying intersectionality in research studies: (1) its supposed inability to adequately address agency and privilege; (2) its apparent lack of a heuristic device illustrating how time, location and context constrain and empower social actors; and (3) an alleged lack of methodological tools to illustrate the inter-related and generative nature of structure and agency.

### INTRODUCTION

Following their scoping review of men caring for family members with dementia, Robinson et al.<sup>1</sup> suggest that finding “a potentially unifying and enriching theoretical framework continues to be a significant

gap in the literature” (p. 423). We suggest here that Intersectionality fills this gap by providing a nuanced and detailed exploration of various aspects of elderly men’s identity which inform their experiences of caring and ultimately their health and well-being.

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Over several decades there has been a steady increase in men participating in unpaid caring work. A shift towards individualism and several waves of feminist thought and action have both challenged notions of the nuclear family and increased female participation in paid employment. At the same time, men have experienced a concomitant increase in roles in the unpaid domestic workspace, including caring work.<sup>2</sup> Elderly men now account for more than half of carers 65 years or older in Australia<sup>3</sup> with similar increases in male caregiving also being noted in the UK and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> In Australia, 82% of male primary carers over 65 are providing care to their ill and impaired spouses.<sup>5</sup>

Caregiving can be a satisfying and rewarding experience for elderly men<sup>6–8</sup> but also a challenging one. Elderly husbands caring for dementia impaired spouses are vulnerable to ambiguous loss and grief,<sup>9</sup> and invisibility and isolation,<sup>10–13</sup> at a time in their lives when they are likely managing their morbidities and physical decline. Caregiving can, therefore, impact both positively and negatively on well-being.

As caregiving is a historically entrenched feminine occupation,<sup>14</sup> gender has been recognised as an important axis in shaping men's approaches to and experiences of caregiving.<sup>1,15–20</sup> However, elderly husband carers are not a homogenous group, rather their experiences of caregiving are diverse, underpinned by their gender, age, class and other identity-defining categories. In turn, these identity aspects are shaped by the situational contexts which husband carers have experienced throughout their lives; that is, prior and present life experiences influence the diversity of ways in which spousal caregiving is enacted by elderly men.

Before highlighting the methods used within the study, we provide further detail and rationale for utilising and combining intersectionality and Bourdieusian frameworks to underpin the research. This includes outlining the strengths and limitations of intersectionality and presenting three of the main tenets of Bourdieu's work; habitus, field and capital. This sets the context for the later combined Findings/Discussion section.

## UTILISING A BOURDIEUSIAN FRAMEWORK TO OPERATIONALISE INTERSECTIONALITY

A key principle of intersectionality is understanding how power operates across and between (at the intersections of) various social categories.<sup>21–23</sup> Identity shaping social categories (or structures) such as gender, race and class are conceptualised as interwoven and mutually informing.<sup>22</sup> In such a context, it is possible therefore not only to be victimised by power but also to simultaneously exercise power over others.<sup>23</sup> The socio-political, historical, cultural and economic environment can both strengthen power in some social categories and/or simultaneously weaken it in others, in different times and locations.<sup>22,23</sup> Focussing on these intersecting processes demonstrates how the power invested in macrostructural forces and experienced in individual locations is produced/reproduced or resisted. Thus, Intersectionality provides a conceptual lens that illustrates how social structures intersect in particular contexts to enable and/or constrain agency. In short, intersectionality can expose the concomitant privilege and/or marginalisation of elderly husbands in their role as spousal carers. As Christensen and Jensen<sup>24</sup> suggest, “Intersectional theory can help us grasp how being a man can be a category of disempowerment and lack of privilege rather than a privileged position” (p. 70).

Despite the clear theoretical value that intersectionality brings, some key ontological and epistemological assumptions remain unaddressed and have caused what Martinez Dy et al.<sup>25</sup> term “a methodological crisis for Intersectionality” (p. 448). Here, we identify three key limitations relating to the practical application of Intersectionality theory to empirical data. Firstly, at its core, Intersectionality is concerned with making visible systems of power and oppression. However, a focus on intersecting forces of oppression can lead, in practical application, to a reductionist and additive tendency.<sup>26</sup> This not only runs counter to the underlying principles of intersectionality—that social categories are constitutive<sup>22,23</sup>—but assumes that categories of difference only strengthen each other<sup>27</sup> resulting in greater marginalisation. Therefore, questions about agency and privilege are also not adequately addressed

because the agency can be both enabled as well as constrained by constitutive social categories.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, there is no heuristic device illustrating how time, location and context converge to constrain or empower social actors. It is left to the researcher to situate individual experiences within these time and locational contexts<sup>26</sup> which can be problematic in application. As Winker and Dengele<sup>29</sup> indicate, Intersectionality works well in theory but is complex to use empirically because the experiences of social actors are premised on difference, and yet it is unclear to both researchers and participants which axes constitute these differences in practice.

Thirdly, the practice of individuals can be complex and contradictory, reproducing social norms (and structures), which may further marginalise, whilst also resisting and challenging such norms.<sup>28</sup> Boogaard and Roggeband,<sup>30</sup> in a study of the Dutch police force, conclude that ethnic minorities and women are simultaneously marginalised and privileged by gender and race axes and the extent to which these groups benefit from, or are marginalised by, gender and race is context dependent. To draw such a conclusion, we assume that structure and agency are inter-related and generative. Yet there are often no methodological tools used to illustrate how structure and agency shape practice in such studies, or tools to show how practice produces and reproduces constitutive structures that subsequently further embed discriminatory and oppressive practices.

Intersectionality is therefore a useful conceptual framework<sup>27</sup> to help understand how complex social relations inform the identity of retired husband carers but its methodological and conceptual limitations pre-empt its use as a unitary theory and methodology when applied to research practice.

For this reason, we draw on Bourdieu's prolific body of work<sup>31–33</sup> to operationalise an intersectional understanding of the husband's experiences of caring for dementia impaired wives. Bourdieu<sup>32</sup> provides a set of empirically developed, inter-related conceptual and constitutive analytical tools in habitus, capital and field which illustrate how history and context converge to produce and reproduce the social order (and structures) through

the generative practice of agents. Here, we understand *habitus* as a repository of social structures that are deposited in the individual as a set of dispositions and tendencies shaping individual practice. The habitus is both a product of practice (is informed by practice) and also a producer of it (produces practices that generate and perpetuate social structures and the inequalities inherent within them). However, the habitus is not immutable, dispositions can be enduring but there is always a choice so that when agency is exercised, it informs the structure of the habitus and evolves individual dispositions.<sup>34</sup> *Fields* are the sites of struggle encompassing the cultural, social, political and economic context of the time, in which the habitus incorporating the history and past experiences of agents, converge.<sup>35</sup> The field is not a level playing field. The position individuals occupy in any given field is informed by the habitus which denotes the capital (and status within the field) available to agents to trade, exchange and/or acquire. If fields provide the bounded sites in which agents compete with each other for status and power, the attainment of capital is the aim of the game. Bourdieu<sup>32</sup> identifies four primary sources of *capital*. Economic capital is a form of monetary capital and or assets and goods which can be transferred into money. Social capital is access to social networks and powerful individuals who can facilitate ascendancy in the field and provide the advantages that higher status can bestow. Cultural capital exists in three states: materialised in books, art and music, institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications and embodied. In the embodied state, cultural capital is imprinted in the mind and the body, manifest in both physicality and ways of acting thinking or feeling; that is, embodied cultural capital becomes a part of the habitus. Here, we have used the term masculine capital to denote the embodied and gendered cultural capital of the husband carers.

Bourdieu's tools<sup>32</sup> thus traverse multiple dichotomies—subjective and objective, individual and social, and structural and agentic—and, as we shall demonstrate in this paper, can, therefore, help address



the methodological weaknesses of Intersectionality outlined above.<sup>36</sup>

## METHOD

In accordance with purposive sampling strategies,<sup>37</sup> participants for this study were recruited based on the following characteristics: retired men of 60 years or older, who are caring for a spouse who has dementia and is living either in their own home or in a nursing home. Prior to recruitment, the study gained ethical approval H10431 from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Western Sydney University.

The final sample consisted of 10, white, heterosexual married men aged between 60 and 86 years living in both rural and urban locations across New South Wales (NSW) (Table 1). The male carer literature largely reflects the experiences of white middle-class men, recruited through service organisations<sup>38</sup>; therefore, a more heterogeneous sample including non-service users (and working-class carers) was considered important in contributing new knowledge to the field. As a modest qualitative study, ethnicity and sexuality were not specifically excluded but neither were they targeted. Employing a multi-strategy approach to recruitment, to ensure a mix of class and carer service users and non-users, was only partially successful. Non-service users proved elusive to recruit

and working-class men (based on occupation prior to retirement) are under-represented. However, several middle-class participants have working-class origins which help provide a detailed examination of class as Emslie et al.'s study<sup>39</sup> of white middle-class men aged in their 60s and 70s in Western Scotland noted. The working-class origins of these men shaped their identities in retirement in different ways to the men raised in middle-class households.<sup>39</sup>

### *Husband carer characteristics*

Two consecutive qualitative data collection methods were used to complement and contribute to gathering rich and thick accounts<sup>40</sup> of the elderly husband's experiences of caring. The first stage involved semi-structured interviews completed with all 10 men. These provided a focus on the phenomena of interest (men's experiences of caring) whilst simultaneously allowing interviewees the freedom to elaborate and deviate from questions.<sup>41</sup> Four interviews took place in the homes of the participants, chosen by men to be a convenient and safe place for the interviews.<sup>37</sup> A further six interviews took place either by telephone or Skype as a pragmatic solution to the widespread geographic location of participants across the state of New South Wales. The second stage of research involved photo-elicitation techniques. This stage was designed as a complementary component of the original

**TABLE 1** Husband Carer Characteristics

Participant pseudonym	Age (years)	Occupation prior to retirement	Care recipient dementia type	Length of time caring in years*
Pete	82	Systems analyst	Alzheimer's	7
Phil	73	Courier business owner	Alzheimer's and Vascular dementia	3
Reg	76	Teacher	Frontal Lobe (Pick's Disease)	6
Colin	74	School superintendent	Alzheimer's	1–2
Len	70	School principal	Alzheimer's	7
Andrew	60	Financial planning business owner	Frontal Lobe (Pick's Disease)	10+
David	72	Railway worker	Undiagnosed	1
Jeff	73	Dentist	Vascular Dementia	6
Sam	86	Industrial engineer	Alzheimer's	10+
Norris	75	Not stated	Alzheimer's	1

\*The intensity of care needed is not always reflected in the length of time the husbands have been caring for their wives. Different types of dementia have different paths of progression and affect individuals in different ways.

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interviews. A key strength of photo-elicitation is that it allows insights to emerge which may not be evident from verbal only interviews by giving participants power and agency, over the research process.<sup>42–44</sup> Six of the participants opted to take part in this second, photo-elicitation phase which involved further semi-structured interviews to explore and discuss the photographs taken by the husband carer participants. In total, 16 interviews were therefore completed with the 10 men.

The modest sample size in this study is therefore offset by a research design that involves two data collection stages incorporating data from 16 interviews in addition to the visual data provided through photo-elicitation techniques. Interviews lasted between 40 and 120 minutes.

The constant comparison method<sup>45</sup> was drawn on to provide an overview and sense of coherence and familiarity with the data prior to a more formal thematic analysis. This involved comparing interviews with each other and with the visual and verbal data collected during the photo-elicitation stage of the research. The thematic analysis followed the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke.<sup>46</sup> Initial coding was completed independently by the first author, further coding, categorising and development of themes was undertaken by both authors. Nvivo software was used to help assist and manage the coding process.<sup>47</sup> Data collection and analysis operated through a process of abductive reasoning, with an iterative movement between theory and data, broader categories and, ultimately, theme development.<sup>48</sup>

## FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

In this paper, we highlight two specific aspects of men's caregiving experiences: independence and self-sufficiency and (linked to this), men's coping strategies and emotional autonomy. These represent amended sub-themes of the full findings from a qualitative study investigating how identity influences the practices and experiences of the health and well-being of husbands caring for dementia impaired wives. These themes will be used to illustrate how intersections between gender, class and age converge to inform hegemonic masculine configurations of independence and autonomy and how the coping strategies used to protect

emotional autonomy, are embedded and embodied in gender, class and age axes.

Three issues were outlined earlier which highlighted some suggested weaknesses in applying Intersectionality to empirical research. Here, we attempt to demonstrate how these issues can be addressed by using Bourdieu's tools of habitus, capital and field to operationalise Intersectionality when researching husband's experiences of caring for dementia impaired wives.

First, Intersectionality has been criticised for not adequately addressing agency and privilege as the agency can be simultaneously enabled as well as constrained by constitutive social categories.<sup>25</sup> The embodied hegemonic masculine ideal is often noted to be strong, muscular and youthful.<sup>49</sup> This being the case, the corporeal decline men experience as they age represents a loss of physical (masculine) capital<sup>50, 51</sup> which has implications for how husband carers practice independence and autonomy. Colin (74, retired school superintendent), for example, has resigned himself to living with the stiffness and pain of his arthritis to maintain his and his wife's independence as a couple despite the benefit an operation could provide:

My sister said, "When are you going to have your hip replaced?" I said, "Well I'm going to hope that I don't have to have it done dear at all." Because what do I do with [my wife] if I'm in hospital for two weeks, or whatever? (*Colin, 74 retired school superintendent*)

Independence for husband carers of working-class origin is achieved through the practical skills that they bring to their marriage; knowing how to care for themselves and, by default, how to care for their wives. As Reg (76, retired teacher) explains:

I was brought up in Ireland and my mother had this philosophy that she would never leave me at the mercy of some woman, so I was taught to cook and look after myself generally, which has always been very useful. Probably more for my wife than anything else but never mind that. (*Reg, 76, retired teacher*)

Reg implicitly conceptualises domestic skills as feminine work by noting that his mastery of these skills is useful for his wife. However, he also frames his ability to perform such work as an important aspect of his self-sufficiency which has symbolic masculine capital for ageing men.<sup>52, 53</sup> Similarly, David (72,

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retired railway worker) describes how his cooking skills developed through a need to look after himself during his youth when railway relief work necessitated his absence from home over a long period of time:

I have always cooked over a period of time because even when I was younger, working, I used to be away for a long period of time at different locations and I had to cook my own meals or else you had to go out and buy it. (David, 72, retired railway worker)

David's experience illustrates how his competence in feminised tasks such as cooking still provides masculine capital for working-class men, provided it is either acquired in masculine fields of employment and/or reframed to emphasise self-sufficiency and independence.

For elderly, middle-class husbands, independence and autonomy are initially often not linked as clearly to their ability to perform practical tasks. Rather, these middle-class men more often articulated independence as not burdening friends or not burdening the state. Sam (86, retired industrial engineer), at least a decade older than Reg and David, uses a walking stick. He can no longer safely perform domestic and gardening tasks so has a cleaner and gardener come once per fortnight *"to mow the lawns and do some small jobs around the place"*. When asked if this help is provided through any statutory provision he responds:

No, I get no assistance from anybody actually. I can manage apart from those two things. There is other people need it more than I do. (Sam, 86, retired industrial engineer)

For Sam, assistance is narrowly defined here to mean benevolent assistance from friends, family or the State. As he pays for a gardener and a cleaner, he readily states that he receives *"no assistance from anybody"*. Reg (76, retired teacher), originating from a working-class family, has the competence and ability to perform domestic tasks. However, having transitioned into middle-class as an adult, and now with resources at his disposal, he can outsource the tasks he no longer can or wants to do, engaging a cleaner *"who does the bathrooms"* and *"a fella who does the hard work, the mowing and that sort of stuff"* in the garden. By paying for services, middle-class men can

claim independence and autonomy even though it is evident that their reasons for such arrangements (their own corporeal decline) illustrate growing dependency.

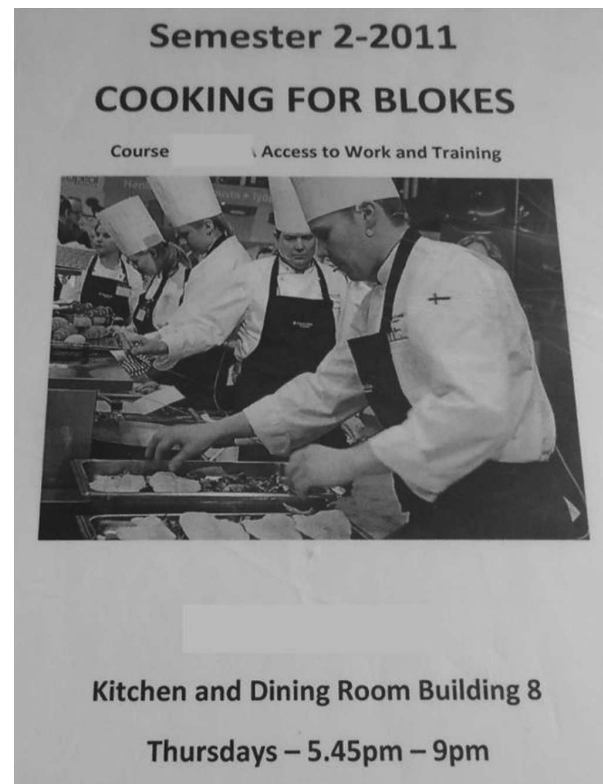
Class and age distinctions, therefore, emerge from the experiences of agents in fields (such as work and family)<sup>31</sup> which both empower and constrain the agency of these husband carers to maintain independence and autonomy. Enabled by the economic capital of his middle-class status, Sam (86, retired industrial engineer) can mitigate effects of the corporeal decline on his independence by privately contracting services that remain within his sphere of control and in doing so affirms his independence and masculine identity. Working-class men such as David (72 years) and to some extent Reg (76, retired school teacher) with working-class origins, are initially enabled by the practical (instrumental) and embodied cultural capital embedded in their working-class habitus. Men like David (72, retired railway worker) are empowered, as men, by bodies previously strengthened in masculine and physically demanding fields of employment<sup>54</sup> and concurrently as carers through their competence in domestic work which is reframed to emphasise self-sufficiency and independence.<sup>19</sup> Yet, this embodied and instrumental form of cultural capital is often weakened as these men age and experience a further corporeal decline.<sup>50</sup> Simultaneously constrained by a hegemonic masculine self-sufficiency script, and in the absence of economic or other forms of capital to mitigate the effects of corporeal decline, working-class husband carers are more likely to need formal statutory aged care provision to continue providing spousal care. However, as men, they are also more likely to resist seeking such support<sup>55</sup> until a crisis is reached.<sup>16,56</sup> Bourdieu's tools of habitus, field and capital thus illustrate how class—through its intersection with masculinities and age—concomitantly privileges and marginalises husband carers as they navigate the effects of the corporeal decline and its associated threats to their independence and autonomy. As we show, this process enables the agency and privilege of middle-class men to mitigate the effects of

corporeal design whilst simultaneously marginalising working-class men whose agency is more often constrained.

Second, Intersectionality is seen as lacking a heuristic device illustrating how time, location and context constrain and empower social actors. We suggest that Bourdieu's notion of habitus fills this gap by linking time and location contexts to the agency of individual actors. As the previous point illustrated, the various ways in which husband carers articulate their independence and autonomy sit at the intersection of masculinities, class and age. The age axis has thus far been understood as ageing and linked to corporeal decline, representing an inevitable loss of physical (and masculine) capital. However, age here is also understood as generational, linking historical norms and values to current practice. As David explains:

My parents brought me up, brought all of our family up, all the boys, all to be able to do anything and everything with our hands. Like, even knitting. I am very, very bloody slow but I know how to do it. (*David, 72, retired railway worker*)

In David's family, the ability to do things 'with our hands' eclipses the gender normative separate spheres ideology which was likely at its height during the 1950s when David was growing up. Skill in performing hands-on tasks is often a class-orientated form of cultural capital for elderly working-class men due to the emphasis on practical and technical skills required in industrial and manufacturing labour markets.<sup>57</sup> Such requirements may well have changed in contemporary society as working-class men learn to adapt to service economies.<sup>57,58</sup> Practical, hands-on skills are therefore embedded and embodied in David's habitus as an elderly working-class man. These embedded and embodied practices re-emerge in the way he maintains his autonomy and independence as a husband carer, asserting his self-sufficiency in knowing how to look after himself and his wife. This differs from the way independence and autonomy is maintained by middle-class men, who initially often lack these



practical skills as Len (70, retired school principal) and photograph explains:

I had no idea how to cook, I was the worst there. But I learnt and I – each Saturday now I do a thing on the slow cooker and I freeze it. But if I hadn't done that course I don't know what I would have done. It was fantastic! (*70, retired school principal*)

Len is of similar age to David but, as a middle-class man, domestic work in his marriage was the responsibility of his wife, consistent with the separate spheres ideology likely practiced in his family home growing up. This means middle-class husband carers either have to learn these new skills and/or draw on their economic capital to buy in services to maintain continued independence and autonomy as their wives' functionality deteriorates. These examples illustrate the potential of the habitus as a structuring structure, shaping individual experiences in fields (such as family and work) whilst simultaneously being shaped by them.<sup>34</sup> The various ways in which husband carers assert their independence and autonomy sit at the intersection of masculinities, age (bodily and



generationally) and class. These gender, class and age distinctions emerge from various experiences of husband carers as they navigate fields such as family, education and work which shape the habitus in particular times and locations to enable or constrain agency in the present.<sup>34</sup> The habitus thus provides the intersectional link between historic norms and values which are reformulated and re-enacted in current practice.

Finally, Intersectionality is said to lack methodological tools that illustrate the inter-related and generative nature of structure and agency and therefore cannot explain the complex and contradictory nature of the individual practice.<sup>25,59</sup> We suggest that using the habitus as a conceptual tool, with consideration towards its interaction with particular fields,<sup>32</sup> can provide the important generative link between structure and agency that intersectionality might otherwise be lacking.

Emotional autonomy, as a hegemonic configuration of masculine practice,<sup>49</sup> is deposited in men's habitus as they move through, and interact in, various fields.<sup>34</sup> Caring for a dementia-impaired wife can often trigger processes of change and uncertainty as Colin (74, retired school principal) explains<sup>60</sup>:



The future is looking a bit rusty - we sort of had plans - we had plans to go over and see our son in America, I think that flight is a bit long for [my wife] now, I don't think we'll get back to the States. There's a wonderful road sign there called Mayday Road. Well I'm hoping that although it's looking a bit rusty, I'm hoping that we're not really at Mayday yet. (Colin, 74, retired school superintendent)

Colin's discussion of the future involves sadness and loss; long overseas trips to see family members are no longer possible. His anxiety and possibly fear in response to the prospect of 'Mayday', looms large in his consciousness despite his wife's diagnosis of only mild stage dementia.

The increasing dependence of David's (72 years, retired railway worker) wife means he has also had to give some consideration to the future. His wife is as yet undiagnosed despite needing constant vigilance and help with personal care and hygiene which is threatening their autonomy as a couple and his independence as he explains:

I have accepted the fact that the time is going to come when I won't be able to keep her at home. And the only worries I've got now is if she goes into a home of some sort, what's going to happen with the house, you know. And that does give me a bit of a worry (David, 72 years)

David's thoughts about the future, and his concern for his home rather than the implications of separating from his wife of over 50 years, appear to be reflective of 'caring for'—a focus on the instrumental aspects of caring, rather than 'caring about'—the affective and emotional aspect of caring.<sup>60</sup> However, examined through an intersectional identity lens, David's focus on the practicalities of his wife's care provision is illustrative of the pragmatism embedded in his habitus as a retired working-class man. David can 'care for' his wife precisely because he 'cares about' her,<sup>60</sup> though his care (his emotional affect) is communicated as deeds rather than words,<sup>61</sup> with a focus on the practicalities of his wife's care provision. This focus on practicalities appears to limit, in the short term, the loss and grief that his wife's imminent placement in residential care is likely to mean. This corresponds with Calansanti and King's<sup>16</sup> findings which suggest that some men deal with the emotional challenges of caregiving by blocking/suppressing emotions to focus on tasks. Colin (74, school superintendent) however is experiencing considerable anxiety. "Hoping that we're not at May Day yet" suggests trepidation about the difficulties and challenges to come and this poses a specific problem, as he explains:

I suppose that one of my problems is that I was brought up in an era when men face problems with a stiff upper

lip, big boys don't cry type thing. And sometimes I feel like crying but I don't (*Colin, 74, school superintendent*)

"Big boys don't cry", a reference to the emotional restraint experienced in Colin's childhood, has been deposited in his habitus through his engagement in fields such as family, education and paid employment. To acquire and maintain masculine capital, Colin, like other men of his generation, has learned as a young boy to refrain from externalising emotions which risked making him appear weak or effeminate.<sup>49, 62</sup> Therefore, as a husband carer, feeling anxious about what his wife's dementia is likely to mean in the future creates a dilemma for Colin, as the following image and excerpt illustrate:



**Colin:** The men I play [golf] with know about [my wife's] problems, but you know, we choose not to talk about that. This photo of a big pelican sitting on a thing with his head tucked down underneath his wings. That I must admit is how I feel often. That I'm sort of bunkered down and thinking, "Well, this is the way it is, so let's duck out of the wind"

**LKD:** So the cold wind is what's to come then, and the ducking out is kind of bracing yourself a little bit?

**Colin:** Yeah, yeah, and ducking very largely into myself. One of the nice things is that I can sit here and talk to you on the phone and say those things. If I said that in front of [my wife] she would get so upset because of what she perceives she is doing to me.

Colin's initial and unreflexive response to the emotional turmoil he is experiencing as a spousal carer is to "duck" largely into him(self)." In "ducking

into (him) self" rather than seeking support, he reproduces the gendered structures underpinning emotional autonomy as a masculine (and hegemonic) configuration of practice. However, the habitus is not immutable, social structures can be resisted and/or challenged enabling agency and the habitus to evolve.<sup>34</sup> Colin has accrued significant cultural capital over the years nurturing his reflexivity through his work in public education, rising through the ranks from primary school teacher to school superintendent. Knowledge and reflexivity are important forms of cultural capital for middle-class men. Here, they enable Colin's agency to resist hegemonic masculine configurations of practice and find solutions which will help him address his anxiety:

Having decided that I can talk to you, well if I can talk to you then I can probably – and I'm not in dire straits at the moment – I can probably talk to other people. (*Colin, 74, School superintendent*)

Benefitting from the symbolic cultural capital of his middle-class status, Colin is empowered to both recognise and resist the notion of emotional autonomy. This contrasts with David's agency to communicate the loss and grief of his likely separation from his wife<sup>63</sup> which is largely obfuscated and constrained by a habitus primed for practicalities and the completion of tasks. However, whilst Colin is enabled to resist this hegemonic configuration of practice, he stops short of challenging it. He chooses to seek emotional support in anonymous and confidential settings such as Beyond Blue and/or via the administration of his retirement village, rather than participating in the face-to-face and more public domain of the carer support group. This demonstrates the contradictory practice of individuals whose status and power realised through symbolic forms of capital enables a greater agency to recognise and resist gender, class and/or generational structures. Yet, by resisting rather than challenging these structures, they are reproduced via the habitus of others with less capital and status (power). Hegemonic configurations of practice to maintain emotional independence and autonomy are highly valued by working-class men,<sup>64</sup> who lack other forms of capital which can be traded for masculine capital.<sup>52</sup>

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This has material implications that are documented in the caregiving literature. Stoicism coupled with a focus on task in caregiving can jointly conceal and/or compel men to repress emotional vulnerability<sup>62</sup> which in time, often ends in a crisis for husband carers.<sup>16,56</sup>

As we see then, Bourdieu's work has value in providing the tools (through habitus, capital and field) to understand the rewarding, challenging and often contradictory nature of elderly husbands' care practices. These tools are particularly helpful in addressing what has been seen as the limitations of applying an intersectional framework to the empirical research process.

### LIMITATIONS

This work has limitations. It is a comparatively modest study in terms of sample size, though this is partly offset by the inclusion of photo-elicitation techniques that added to the depth and detail of the data obtained. Furthermore, it is a relatively homogenous sample despite early attempts to engage a broader diversity of participants. Efforts to attain a heterogeneous sample in terms of service/non-service users and class were only partially successful—though we hope to have demonstrated sufficient diversity in terms of the latter through the analysis. The work was also focused only on elderly husbands caring for wives with dementia and we acknowledge that elderly men caring for partners with other illnesses may have both similar and different experiences in terms of independence, self-sufficiency and coping and emotional autonomy. However, as the primary purpose of this paper was methodological rather than empirical, the important task was in providing sufficient data to support the discussion of points being made and future papers will focus on the findings themselves in greater detail.

### CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to demonstrate how Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, capital and field can facilitate the operationalisation of intersectionality. To facilitate this, we utilised empirical work looking at elderly husbands' experiences around independence and autonomy, and their coping strategies and emotional autonomy, when caring for their wives with dementia.

The empirical data show how the working-class husbands draw on practical skills, learnt as children and enhanced through manual labour, to directly provide task-related care such as cooking and even personal care. In contrast, the middle-class husband's independence and autonomy were sustained more often through their ability to buy-in help such as gardening or cleaning and thereby avoid burdening their family, friends or the state. While approaching care in an instrumental way functioned as a positive coping mechanism for the working-class husbands in the short term, it could be detrimental in the longer term repressing emotional needs and leading to a potential crisis. For the middle-class husbands, cultural capital and communication skills accrued through past experiences in higher level service industries, facilitated an ability to challenge emotional stoicism providing greater opportunity, and capacity, to articulate their own care needs. This has important implications for the provision of aged care and carer support services to elderly husband carers of dementia impaired spouses to ensure health equity.

Methodologically, we have demonstrated that, in the context of caregiving, Bourdieu's work can highlight how male privilege and marginalisation are *simultaneously* mediated by class and the contexts in which it operates. This helps to address the claim that intersectionality does not adequately illustrate in an empirical application the constitutive nature of social categories that intersect to both constrain and enable agency. We further suggest that using habitus, and its interaction with fields and acquired capital as conceptual tools, provides the methodological resources for understanding the complex nature of structure-agency links; a resource said to be lacking when applying intersectionality theory. Finally, we showed how Bourdieu's notion of habitus is a particularly useful device for addressing the criticism that intersectionality fails to illustrate how time, location and context can empower or constrain individual action. Understanding how past and present contexts are simultaneously contested, restructured and embodied is key to understanding the individual identities and practices of these elderly husbands as they embark on and continue their caregiving journeys. In short, we have demonstrated how Bourdieu's work can help

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operationalise intersectionality in empirical work in ways that assist in drawing out, illuminating and explaining the nuanced mechanisms that lead to health disparities.

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